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SUBJECT: Bored To Tears - German Election Leaves Bavarian Youth Cold

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) Bavarian youth and German youth in general were intrigued this past year with "Obamamania" and the workings of the 2008 U.S. presidential campaign and elections that inspired young and old to discuss politics in ways not seen in Bavaria for years. However, despite the prominence in Germany this fall of important social and political themes such as addressing the economic crisis and whether to close down nuclear power facilities, it seems that the September 27 Bundestag elections have failed to capture the imaginations of Bavaria's youth. Although Minister President Horst Seehofer has worked to "rejuvenate" his Christian Social Union (CSU), even students officially associated with the CSU seem disengaged. End Summary.

Major Themes Do Not Resonate Among Students

¶2. (SBU) Informal talks with groups of Bavarian students that the Consulate undertook recently revealed that, among our informal sample at least, Bavarian students were to politics. This held true even for the Bavarian Junge Union (JU), the youth wing of the major Bavarian party, the CSU, whose leadership met with the Consul General and Pol/Econ and Public Affairs sections on August 19. Although the JU delegation expected a "nearly certain" positive outcome for the CDU/CSU, they were surprisingly ill-informed about German and world politics. They also confessed that they were not using social networking media tools such as Twitter or Facebook. The JU students complained that their peers had no time to debate campaign issues seriously, or if they did, they were still not interested in stumping for the CSU. The only topic of interest to students, they told us, was the question of university fees. This has not surfaced as an issue in the national election campaign.

¶3. (SBU) Likewise, contacts in the SPD youth organization "JUSOs" confirmed the relative indifference among that set of students to the current campaigns. We found that they had little interest in the SPD party program itself; rather, students reported that their peers were interested in the "star power" of politicians and the cache that comes from direct, personal contact with them.

Social Networking and Internet Under-used

¶4. (SBU) Expecting the youth organizations to have lively internet presences, we surfed to their homepages. Youth organizations of Bavaria's smaller major parties, SPD/JUSOS, FDP/JULIS, the Greens/Gruene Jugend, and Die Linke/Linksjugend, had home pages that seemed to represent their parties relatively well. As was our impression from talks with the leadership, however, we found that the pages of Junge Union Bayern (Bavaria) (<http://www.ju-bayern.de>) and Junge Union Muenchen (<http://www.ju-muenchen.de>) revealed that the JU either cared little about the Bundestag elections, or was so

sure about the CDU/CSU's success that they saw no need to work hard in cyberspace. We found the pages weak on content and updated infrequently. One link went to stale information on the European Parliament elections, now long past. When we checked before meeting with the JU representatives, links to social networking media such as Twitter and Facebook were missing from the JU Munich homepage. (They have since been added.)

Students Rally over University Fees but
Ignore the "Boring" National Campaign

15. (SBU) Lack of interest in the current Bundestag campaign does not mean that Bavarian students are politically uninvolved. Repeated mass demonstrations protesting student fees in Munich earlier this year, complete with long parades, showed that in matters concerning them directly, the students were highly motivated and active. Likewise, the students we met said they would certainly vote in the elections, although the JU leadership was worried because students complain that university work could keep them from the polls. They told us that students seemed generally unaware of the absentee voting ("Briefwahl") option. The conclusion from our contacts was that students were indifferent to the Bundestag elections because they found the campaigns boring and the politicians unattractive. They even criticized the popular Economics Minister zu Guttenberg for being "too slick." Since current polls already seem to be predicting the outcome, we were told, interest is further depressed.

Comment

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16. (SBU) Politics in Bavaria was turned upside down after the CSU lost the absolute majority in Landtag elections in September 2008. Minister President and CSU chairman Horst Seehofer has since tried to rejuvenate a crusty party apparatus by installing younger ministers and trying to engage more female politicians. His aim is to reassert CSU domination Bavaria-wide. The youth of his party, however, struck us as being lackadaisical about politics. In four weeks, they will probably support the CSU in the Bundestag elections if they go vote, but with constant challenges from the Free Democratic Party (FDP) and Independents (Freie Waehler), the question is, for how long?

17. (U) Consulate General Munich coordinated this report with Embassy Berlin.